

Candid

by Astrid Goes For A Spin

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Summary: Disbelieving, Hiccup runs his eyes over the caption yet again. "Freshmen Hiccup Haddock and Astrid Hofferson sit together in the loft to enjoy the hoedown." A moment that felt private and magical at the time is published in the school yearbook, but Hiccup can't bring himself to be too upset about it.

MODERN.

Candid

**Yeah, yeah. Dragon Drabble Dump is off for the moment - I had a little extreme stress about whether or what I should write for Christmas, it was tragic, and ended up not updating since then. Dragon Keeper is also held up by some panic; I'd written the entire next chapter, like, two years ago, and for a very different story than the one I've written since then. Therefore, major re-writing is called for. **

RL's super busy right now, but here's a oneshot I've been sitting on since August. Enjoy!

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><p>At just about any other time of day, the "hoedown" would have seemed idiotic. Ridiculous. Pointless.<p>

But after a tiring and surprisingly wonderful day at the start-of-school retreat, Hiccup is feeling reckless in the incredibly human magic of this togetherness in the dead of night.

Okay, it isn't quite the dead of night, fine. But ten forty-seven is far too late to get a group activity started when expected to be up and functioning at seven the next morning.

It's late, the barn is bright with multicolored strobes, loud, and packed with students. Heat radiates from every nook and cranny.

It is slightly miserable, and there is something indescribably beautiful about it.

That could have been because of his pretty-much-overnight fellowship with these people, but Hiccup is actually enjoying himself.

The energy of the room is contented and happy, wired and excited. And a little squished.

Hiccup lingers in the middle of the pack in the doorway and wishes desperately for a place, however small, to sit down and take some weight off his leg.

One of the actors shouts garbled, indistinguishable words through his microphone, failing to speak clearly over the lame country music, but gets his point across by indicating above.

Too tired to protest " and somehow, a little too happy, to be just one of the crowd, Hiccup turns obediently with the rest of the unseated and shuffle-hops his way out, gloriously un-stared-at, despite his not comprehending the destination.

Which turns out to be a loft. The loft. The hay loft, Hiccup realizes belatedly. Barns are supposed to have lofts.

A ladder leads to the loft. Oh, God, how is he going to do this? (More importantly, how is he going to get down?) He edges back toward the barn door, but there is absolutely nowhere to sit. And he's not going to go in and demand someone give up their seat with their friends, no matter how much he wants to play the I-saved-all-your-lives-and-lost-a-leg-while-doing-it card.

He manages that lesser evil of the ladder in a series of strange knee movements and fervent wishes that he could go back in time and tell his self from two weeks ago that maybe lifting some weights now and then would be good preparation for later life, which apparently relies quite a bit on the upper body strength that he doesn't have. Like, at all.

He knows that sitting on the edge of the loft is a bad idea. How is he ever going to swing his legs back up?

He feels kind of weird, dangling his legs in some poor kid's face, like he was normal or something equally laughable, but comforts himself with the twelve feet separating him from the people on the floor.

Despite it, he sits there anyway, because it, quite literally, is the best seat in the house, and he kind of wants it after the ladder challenge.

Also, because all the back seats up against the wall, where he could tuck his legs up close to him and relieve the pressure and tension of the physical activity non-accomplished that day are already taken. That glacial mountain water is doing nothing for him.

It honestly has nothing at all to do with Astrid Hofferson until she plops down next to him.

"Ummâ€¦hi," he says, trying to pitch his voice lower than the music in order to be heard.

"Hey." She doesn't have as much trouble. She sits about a foot away from him, gazing down expectantly at the wood planks pretending to be a stage.

A second actor steps up and the music is cut off suddenly. As he launches into a truly inspiring â€" lip synching? Is that the term? â€" of the monologue preceding The Lone Ranger (they're at a _camp, not a dude ranch. Seriously, what is with all the Western stuff?), complete with facial contortions and lots of dramatic turning, Hiccup and Astrid both lean back onto their elbows at the same moment.

Startled, Hiccup shoots her a curious look, but if she sees it, she doesn't react, watching the actor interestedly.

They, like the whole barn, listen quietly and attentively for a few minutes, impressed.

Then Astrid sits up and reaches her left hand toward his right, and he stares at it, unsure. Does she want him to _hold_ it? How â€" how exactly does one hold hands? His mind runs through and discards a dozen awkward possibilities, and he continues to stare.

Finally, he has the presence of mind to sit up and stare.

Astrid crosses her legs at the ankles, recently white ankle socks rubbing together over now completely brown, drenched sneakers, and he knows she's a little nervous, too, even though she's trying not to show it.

She reaches out her other hand, and, still wide-eyed, Hiccup gives his to her. She presses it between her own and fits his fingers between hers, then lets her right arm drop, slapping inaudibly to the wood.

Somehow, it's nowhere near as awkward as he'd feared. Her hand is sweaty, like the rest of her and everyone else around them, and it feels kind of good.

It feels immeasurably better when she leans slowly over and kisses him on the cheek.

For just about the first time in his life, Hiccup loses track of conscious thought and allows himself to just _be._

In his haze of contentedness, Hiccup can't actively recall a moment he was happier.

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And caught on camera.

Disbelieving, Hiccup runs his eyes over the caption yet again. _"Freshmen Hiccup Haddock and Astrid Hofferson sit together in the loft to enjoy the hoedown."_

Freshmen Hiccup Haddock and Astrid Hoffersonâ€¦

It's at least half a page, glossy and colorful in his yearbook. Nine months have passed. Discomfort " or maybe shame " sweeps up from the toes of his foot to the top of his head. What a picture.

Astrid's feet are crossed and extended, tennis shoes wet and stained with mud. Inches away are his, mismatched and

"You found the masterpiece." Hiccup jumps, and Astrid chuckles. "Yeah, I didn't know we were on Candid Camera either." She hops up onto the desk in front of him, leaning down to look more closely.

Hiccup glances at the name under the caption " _Ruff Thorston?_

"Ruffnut took this picture," he says blankly. "Why would Ruffnut take this picture?"

Astrid shrugs. "She's got a soft side to her too, you know."

Hiccup snorts.

"You have to admit" Astrid raises her eyebrows and shrugs.

"Aaaand" did she just guess that whoever would be sitting next to me would be you?"

Astrid's smile is slow and her eyes dance. "I may have told her."

And when Hiccup lets his betrayed eyes slide back to the photo, he does have to admit that there's something undeniably cherubic about the way his mismatched legs and hers hang together.

End
file.